

Animals and the Law:  
Legal Subjects and Oppressed Objects in  
“The Black Cat” and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”

by

Joshua Daniel Wharton

Honors Thesis

Appalachian State University

Submitted to  
The Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

May, 2017

Approved by:

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Zackary Vernon, Ph.D., Thesis Director

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Jennifer Westerman, Ph.D., Second Reader

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Ted Zerucha, Ph.D., Interim Director, The Honors College

### Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Black Cat" have each garnered a large amount of criticism from many different fields of study. However, it seems that many critics prefer to analyze these stories separately and refrain from critiquing the two together. In addition to this, it seems that these two stories have also avoided criticism from the field of animal studies. In my thesis, I attempt to combine these two stories through the lens of animal studies in a way that reveals the stories' plots as, in certain regards, inversions of each other. Through my analysis, I argue that, while these stories reflect a particular historical moment and the problems therein, they still underscore some of the roots that these problems grew out of. These roots that are exhibited in the two stories still seem to exist today and manifest through the problematic presentation of the human-animal binary, the muddling and ignoring of the fluidity of both animal and human subjectivity, and the lack of acknowledgement of different types of subjectivity.

## I. Introduction

Noted as one of the first writers to have created “crime fiction,” it is no surprise that many of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories align with legal concerns. Poe not only writes stories in which characters are confronted with a mystery that officers of the law attempt to unravel, but he also constructs these cases in a way that muddles the way the law is interpreted and carried out. While Poe’s *rationations* most directly focus on crime and detective narration, many of Poe’s short stories revolve around a crime and, consequently, the law. In addition to the legal aspects of Poe’s fiction, his narratives often focus on or include a range of animal characters. “Hop-Frog; or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs,” “The Murders in Rue Morgue,” “The Black Cat,” and “The Raven” are just a small number of such stories. “The Black Cat” and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” in particular, offer up two intriguing instances of animals in contact with the human legal system. “The Black Cat” exposes human methods of subject making and how those methods pertain to animals. It also highlights the perceived differences in the treatment of animals and the treatment of humans. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” brings in animals in a way that complicates the manner in which the law applies to animals. Similar to how “The Black Cat” addresses issues in defining the liberal subject, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” points out problems in defining the legal subject. These narratives underscore how animals as objects complicate the interpretation and employment of the law. Through looking at how these stories interact with human structures, one can find many comparisons between the two that allow them to be read in dialogue with one another. This dialogue is created by way of their divergence from each other in the roles of characters. In the case of “The Murders in Rue Morgue,” Poe sets up

a narrative in which an Orangutan kills two women, leaving a mystery that leads to the question not of finding who the killer is, but if the killer can be legally considered a murderer. “The Black Cat,” in contrast, leaves the reader wondering not who committed crimes or if there was a crime committed, but which crimes count and which do not. For, as the reader sees, the Orangutan goes free after murdering the women, though technically he is convicted, and the narrator in “The Black Cat” is sentenced to death for murder of his wife, but not convicted for his cruelty towards animals. So, in one story, we see a human go unpunished for the murder of an animal. In the other, we have an animal escape with impunity for the murder of two humans.

My argument analyzes “The Black Cat” on its own first, then I make an argument for “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” as a text on its own, and then to conclude my argument, I will bring my analyses of both of these stories in unison to show how they work together to support my thesis. In regards to “The Black Cat”, I argue that the narrator’s denial of all subjects aside from himself obstructs his own conception of subjectivity, and therefore his understanding of himself. My analysis of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” mirrors that of “The Black Cat” by showing how humans’ flawed perceptions of subjectivity cripples our ability to sort out events in which animals commit what might be considered crimes to humans. The narrator’s closing words in “The Black Cat” suggest that animals can interact with the law, but do not specify to what extent and what role intention plays in these interactions. The questions, then, seem to be these: who is wronged, how, by whom, and by what rhetoric are these wrongs justified, convicted, or ignored? While these stories reflect a particular historical moment and the problems therein, they still underscore some of the roots that these problems grew out of. These

roots that are exhibited in the two stories still seem to exist today and manifest through the problematic presentation of the human-animal binary, the muddling and ignoring of the fluidity of both animal and human subjectivity, and the lack of acknowledgement of different types subjectivity.

## **II. Interpretations of “The Black Cat” and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”**

Many critics have delved into at least one and, at times, many of these questions in regards to the stories individually, but criticism pertaining to the two stories together is in short supply. Consequently, it seems necessary to mention a few of the scholarly works that pertain separately to both of these stories. The most common interpretation of “The Black Cat” begins from a psychoanalytic perspective. Roberta Reeder, in “‘The Black Cat’ as a Study in Repression” (1974), attributes the narrator’s deplorable actions to a repression of his instinctual desires. Forming a dual representation of those desires, the wife and the cat are both the objects and symbols of his instinctual desires. Not recognizing this connection, the narrator finds himself in a repressive, internal struggle. Since the connections have been buried deep within his subconscious, the narrator is unable to properly explain his physical and verbal abuse as well as his murder of both the cat and his wife. Continuing with the theme of failed coping mechanisms, only in a different way, Ed Piacentino explains the narrator’s motive and his inability to explain it through a combination of narratological criticism and psychobiographical theory in “Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’ as Psychobiography: Some Reflections on Narratological Dynamics” (1998). This combination surfaces through Piacentino showing how the narrative techniques the narrator employs reveal and map out his own psychological

make up. The narrator “alternate[es] between narrative time and story time” (Piacentino 158), allowing him to critique his own actions and offer up reasons for his behavior in a way that works towards his own benefit. While he believes this will draw the sympathy of the reader, it actually betrays his own lack of mental stability. Piacentino’s article finds much of its foundation in the work of James W. Gargano in “Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’: Perverseness Reconsidered” (1960), an article considered by many to be the “premier essay on ‘The Black Cat’” (Piacentino 153). A portion of my own argument on “The Black Cat” is also based in Gargano’s argument. So, for the time being, it will suffice to summarize Gargano’s piece as arguing that the narrator’s susceptibility to evil is deeply rooted in his “unhealthy overdevelopment of the voluptuary side of his nature” indulging selfishly and ambivalently “in a world of private gratifications” (Gargano 173). This overdevelopment occurred during the narrator’s childhood where he avoided interactions with other humans in favor of his pets. His primary interactions, then, were based off of a relationship void of affect, sought only for the sake of self-gratification.

The criticism concerning “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is slightly less concentrated within specific fields and instead spreads through multiple critical perspectives. In “‘To Make Venus Vanish’: Misogyny as Motive in Poe’s ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’” Joseph Church writes from a feminist perspective. Arguing against more contemporary scholars that support a view of Poe as a more progressive writer, Church asserts that “Poe and his avatars such as Dupin work to punish and silence womankind in the world and its correlatives in the mind that threaten a masculinist ontology” (Church 409). The primary basis for his claim finds its roots in the unpunished murders of the women combined with the rewarding of the man responsible for the

animal that committed the murders. Edward Kozaczka, in “Death as Truth in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’” finds a different significance in the death of the two women. Seeing Dupin as the inviolate male, Kozaczka argues that Dupin uses the erotic tension between himself and the narrator to both use the narrator as a text while also place himself outside of both desire and ontological questioning. The deceased women obstruct his control of the narrative because he cannot determine the nature of their cohabitation. Thus, in his quest to discover the whole truth, he fails to find the answer to the question that poses the largest threat to his power. The women’s death, and resultant inability to voice the nature of their relationship, renders him powerless in ascertaining the truth behind the women’s living situation. Focusing on the presence of voice as opposed to the absence, Paul Jahshan offers a Derridian reading of voice in “The Deferred Voice in ‘The Murders in the Rude Morgue’” (2002). Jahshan views Poe’s story as an allegory for both the deferred voice, the voice of “the real *before*” that is marginalized, and “the apparent *now*”, or the act of reading the text (79). Jahshan examines many of the voices in the text, but primarily focuses on the difference between the narrator’s act of writing the events into being and how this is in some ways dependent on and in other ways overshadowed by the readers process of reading the story into the “apparent now”. By doing this, the reader brings the events of the story into the present.

As one can see, both of these stories have a considerably large basis of existing scholarship. These stories have not only merited a scholarship from a large amount of scholars, but they have also garnered criticism from many different fields of study. While a bulk of criticism on Poe’s stories come from feminist or psychoanalytic scholars, it seems that many scholars find his work to allow for many different types of readings.

Considering this, I find that there is still room for different theoretical analyses within the body of work already done on Poe's stories. I also find that, while there is a large amount of criticism concerning each individual text, few theorists have proposed viewing the two stories together. Consequently, I wish to not only bring analyses of these two stories together, but also to contribute to the body of work existent from a perspective "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" seem to have for the most part avoided: animal studies.

### **III. Constructing a Dialogue Between Animal Studies and Biopolitics**

Considering the prominence of animals in these two stories, it is surprising that the field of animal studies has not weighed in more significantly in analyzing these narratives. Colleen Glenney Boggs seems to be the only scholar that has devoted a significant amount of space towards analyzing these two stories from an animal studies perspective. In *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (2013), Boggs brings together a host of seemingly unrelated or oppositional theories and ideas into a dialogue that maps out and sorts through the question of "what is the cultural and political work of animal representations" (3). On a more general scale, Boggs does this through bringing the schools of biopolitical theory and animal studies into a conversation with one another. After plotting out the progression of the theories she employs, she uses critical analyses to show how historical events and literary texts support the addition she wishes to make to both biopolitical theory and animal studies and the way they work together. Instead of using these sources to frame a theoretical argument, I would like to, in a way, do the opposite of what she does. The purpose of her book seems to be furthering our understanding of biopolitics and how it relates to animal



studies. The purpose of my own paper is to apply her additions to these fields to “The Black Cat” and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in order to extend the field of Poe criticism, instead of biopolitics and animal studies. I differentiate my argument from hers in the way that I combine the two stories and examine them as inversions of each other. Boggs, while making some connections between the two stories, examines them primarily as separate from each other. In addition to this, the connecting line she draws between the two stories is created through the theme animal love, a theme I diverge from. While her argument towards connecting the stories through animal love and bestiality is expertly displayed, I find the stories to be more connected through their connections between animals and the law. Primarily, I would like to employ the theoretical foundation she lays to analyze “The Black Cat” and “The Murders in Rue Morgue” as co-texts that show how human ideas of subjectivity and the language of the law objectify animals in a way that justifies their abuse by humans while also placing them in a position of privilege that grants them a certain amount of agency with and immunity from the powers of the state. Consequently, her criticism on “The Black Cat” and “The Murders in Rue Morgue” is important and directly related to my own topic, but also the theoretical work established through her book is the primary basis of my own argument. Consequently, it is necessary to go more in depth on her work than I have on other pieces concerning these two stories.

Boggs begins her book by looking into how the field of animal studies is divided between ethical, animal-rights arguments and post-structuralist arguments. The division is not so much a division of conflict but a division of interest. The animal-rights section of animal studies argues for an inclusivity that counts animals among the human idea of

subject. The post-structuralist portion of animal studies seeks to deconstruct our notion of subject altogether through fleshing out the problems that both the physical embodiment and symbolic representation of animals cause in the making and unmaking of the liberal subject. Instead of focusing on one of these sides, Boggs “places the two approaches in dialogue with each other and argues that the way we read subjectivity depends on the way we represent the relationship between human beings and animals” (Boggs 4).

While the animal rights portion of animal studies has its own particularities, the general nature of its conceptual underpinnings are more easily understood than its post-structuralist counterpart. Consequently, it is essential to both Boggs’s argument and my own to elucidate the complexities that make up the foundation of post-structuralist animal studies. Boggs transitions from animal rights to post-structuralism by pointing out that the arguments for and against animal rights lack “an understanding of the ways in which the liberal subject already depends at its core on a relationship with animals that undercuts this binary and that reveals ‘the animal’ as well as ‘the human’ to be a ‘linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical construct’” (Boggs 5). Post-structuralism then weighs in on this issue in the way that it challenges “the schema of the knowing subject and its anthropocentric underpinnings” (Boggs 5) and instead puts an emphasis on feeling. This notion, however, Boggs appropriately points out is not implicit or even assumed in a typical understanding of post-structuralism. In showing how post-structuralism relies on the notion of affect, Boggs employs Rei Terada’s work in *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the Death of the Subject* (2001). Boggs’s interpretation of Terada’s work sees affect as the uniting between the “physiological and the psychological” (6), where one only experiences emotion through one’s “acts of

interpretation and identification by means of which we feel for others” (6). By placing this notion of affect and the question of what counts as other in direct alignment of importance with humans’ tendency to both objectify and privilege animals as both beasts and sentimentalized companions, Boggs shows how “the subject is not self-sufficient but relies on affective relationships that cross the species line” (6).

It is here that I find my analysis of “The Black Cat” in direct alignment with Boggs’s theoretical argument pertaining to the human establishment of the liberal subject. However, my argument also stems from the connection she makes between post-structuralist animal studies and biopolitical theory. The basis of this connection is found in the theoretical transition from animal studies into posthumanist studies. Posthumanism, Boggs argues, resulted as an alternative to animal studies that patches up some of the holes left in the foundation of animal studies. Posthumanism derives from the challenging of “Enlightenment models of subjectivity by reflecting on modern technologies’ ability to mimic core traits of the human” (Boggs 8). Thus, posthumanism grew from the analyses of the ways that developing technology skews our current understanding of the separation between “culture and nature, biology and technology” (Boggs 8). What Boggs focuses on here is posthumanism’s “commitment to seeing the connections between seemingly disparate entities and an attentiveness to embodiment” (8). The symbolic weight of embodiment, the bodies engagement within various theoretical discourses, and the way that technology interacts and disrupts humanist notions of these concepts seem to be at the core of posthumanist study. Boggs, in her theoretical discourse, trades the posthumanist interest in technology and how it pertains to our definition of human in favor of an interest in cross-species relationships and how they pertain to our

understanding of human. Consequently, her interest shifts “from notions of ‘post’ to the concept of ‘inter’, as in ‘intersubjective,’ ‘interrelated,’ ‘interactive,’ [and] ‘interspecies’” (9). Even with her added notions to posthumanism, there still exists a dichotomy similar to the one existent in animal studies: the difference in “approach based on embodiment and one concerned primarily with semiotics” (10). This is imilar to how animal studies is divided between a focus on embodiment with animal rights and a focus on semiotics with post-structuralism. Posthumanist arguments tend to come from either a space that attempts to move past humanity’s anthropocentric ideals through analyzing embodiment or a frame that attempts to decenter the human through deconstructing semiotic relationships.

From this, Boggs brings biopolitics into the discussion in the way that its transferall “from rights to lives” (10) emulates this tension between semiotic and embodied interpretations. Consequently, Boggs believes that “we need to bring animal studies and posthumanism in conversation with inquiries into the way biopolitics operates in that biopolitics at its core aggregates itself the power to define whose ‘lives’ matter” (10), the place that those lives uphold in society, and how that position is embodied. While Foucault coined the term biopolitics, Boggs points out that he said comparatively little on the actual development of the theory. He did, however, identify “two vectors of biopower: one, the *anatom-politics of the human body* which were “ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines”; and two, “a *biopolitics of the population*” (Boggs 10). One portion of biopolitics, *anatomo-politics*, relates to the individual, and *biopolitics* represents the population in a combination that surmounts to the creation and expression of *biopower*. Boggs, then, keenly points out that the

tautological nature of defining the individual and population through the relation one has to the other represents the prime power, weakness, and conceit of biopower. The only way the human individual and population are able to define themselves in a non-tautological way, however, is through the “deliberate exclusion of the nonhuman from the realm of political representation” (Boggs 11). Consequently, Boggs argues that “animals are integral in two ways to a full understanding of biopolitics. First, the “anatomopolitics of the modern state does not limit its reach to human bodies but also exercises power over animal bodies; and second, the differentiation between human beings and animals is the fundamental mechanism by which biopolitics exerts power” (Boggs 11). Once this is understood, one can move on towards seeing how biopower relies upon a presentation of species difference in an ambivalent rather than concrete way that allows “for the contradictory power to both dissolve and reinscribe borders between humans and animals” (Boggs 11) when situations call for such rhetoric.

It is here that I find how using these ideas can help one understand how “The Murders in Rue Morgue” and “The Black Cat” show the ways in which biopower exerts its force to muddle interpretations of subjectivity in ways that render the law as both an oppressive and inadequate force in its dealings with crimes related to animals. “The Black Cat” shows how this pertains to the human, individual subject in its relation to the animal. “The Murders in Rue Morgue” shows how these ideas manifest and become problematic when animals act with a subjectivity that the language of the law denies. This denial results in the law rendering itself incapable of finding an accountable subject in the case of certain crimes committed.

#### IV. “The Black Cat” and Crimes against the Non-Human Animal

##### Subject

As mentioned earlier, Bogg’s argues for notions of bestiality within “The Black Cat.” She argues that the narrator’s subjectivity is flawed due to a combination of a bestial sort of love attachment to his animals and a failure of Lockean pedagogy (116). While I find a portion of my argument based in her use of John Locke’s work, I diverge from her argument in that I find, instead of bestial love, self love to be the other half of the source of the narrator’s flawed subjectivity. In addition to this, Boggs does not find motive in the narrator as a result of the animals and his wife objectifying him, as I do. I find it appropriate to begin with my analysis of “The Black Cat” before my argument on “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”. The narrator’s perversity seems to actually be a combination of a flaw in the development of his subjectivity and how that pertains to his inability to acknowledge subjectivity that is not his own. The narrator, claiming to be sane, wishes to “place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events” (Poe 381). While he manages to succinctly summarize his first few years of marriage, he fails in plainly stating what happened and offers many of his own comments. Beginning as a harmless animal lover, the narrator, after a few years of marriage, falls prey to intemperance and then descends into an aggressive pattern of animal and spousal abuse. The animal abuse reaches a climax when he gouges out the eye of his cat and then proceeds to hang it. The story itself ends in the narrator’s murder of his wife and his subsequent arrest. He blames his intemperance and the horrendous acts on the perversity within all men. However, upon a close inspection of the text, one can see that his mental collapse is actually a result of his underdeveloped subjectivity that

renders him unable to recognize other living beings as anything other than objects. This flawed subjectivity is masked during childhood by his tenderness towards animals and estrangement from other humans. It becomes slightly more visible in young adulthood as he descends into alcoholism. Finally, it becomes completely apparent when the closest objects in his life, his wife and cats, assert themselves as subjects by acting against him.

His flawed subjectivity can be explained through “a key mechanism of biopolitics by which forms of power as seemingly disparate as state authority and familial intimacy get conjoined and worked out via animal representations” (Boggs 2). While many aspects of biopolitics could lend help in interpreting “The Black Cat,” this one idea of symbolic transferalls is what this section of my essay focuses on. Colleen Glenney Boggs, in *Animalia Americana: Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity*, devotes an entire chapter towards analyzing the narrator in “The Black Cat” through such a lens. Boggs offers up an image of the narrator as a human unable to fully develop his subjectivity as a result of his inability to transfer his childish tenderness towards animals to a matured intimacy with other human beings, especially his wife. Boggs explains the basis of her literary analyses in her book, arguing that many stories “reveal animal representations to be a complex site where the construction of subjectivity occurs by affective means and pedagogical methods that hinge on the literal relationships to animals and on their figurative representation” (2). Returning to her ideas that subjectivity is developed and understood through affective relationships, the reader can understand how the narrator’s inability to recognize other subjects, and consequent paralysis of his empathetic capabilities, stunts his subjective formulation. The narrator of “The Black Cat” fails to feel for others because he sees all others as objects, and, in so doing, undermines his own

subjectivity. This renders him unable to understand his wife's subjectivity. Consequently, his view of her is parallel to his view of his pets as objects.

The foundation for this parallel is set up in the opening paragraph. By summarizing the story as "a series of mere household events," the narrator places himself within "the feminized domestic sphere" (Bliss 96). This primes the mind of the reader to understand that the following narrative is a masculine representation of events occurring in an environment culturally understood to be that of the feminine. However, in the following paragraph, the narrator describes his earlier self to be much more feminine than masculine.

From Infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and was never so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. (Poe 382)

Ann V. Bliss, in "Household Horror: Domestic Masculinity in Poe's 'The Black Cat,'" mentions how a popular understanding of masculinity clashes with the "nurturing, almost maternal, way he cares for his pets" (69). Though his description of himself sounds feminine, he refuses to acknowledge his lack of masculinity, claiming that his indulgences are only a "peculiarity of character [that] grew with my growth, and, in my



manhood” (Poe 382). Bliss finds the man’s motivation for his horrendous acts in his inability to appropriate his feminine traits as sensitive masculinity. The narrator is deeply disturbed by his feminine traits, and, thus continuously attempts to assert his masculinity through alcoholism, aggression, and violence.

While Bliss makes a sound argument in support of her thesis, James W. Gargano, in “Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’: Perverseness Reconsidered,” finds the narrator’s perverseness to be an aggressive manifestation of the narrator’s deeply rooted and long festering selfishness and self absorption. Both of these theories, however, seem to aid in the interpretation explored throughout my analysis of the short story. This is because Gargano introduces another dimension to the narrator’s peculiarities apart from his feminine traits. Though the narrator’s treatment of animals manifests in a feminine way, it can also be read as an “unhealthy overdevelopment of the voluptuary side of his nature” (Gargano 173). Essentially, his self-indulgent behavior is “an abnormality, for it thrives on a wanton ignorance of his own ambivalence” (Gargano 173). The negative side of his tenderness towards animals lies in his neglect of humans. Readers see this through his preference of animals over “the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of man” (Poe 382). The hint that it is primarily self-indulgence, rather than altruism, lays in his continuous description of his behavior as indulgent, and the supreme pleasure he receives from “feeding and caressing them” (Poe 382). This unchecked self-indulgence and unnoticed ambivalence creates a “private world” (Gargano 173) wherein the narrator is able to ignore his own deficiencies and avoid the problems the outer world poses to his own conception of self.

In this state of self-indulgent tenderness, perceived as femininity, the narrator's subjective growth is stunted. The negative aspects of his actions continue on unnoticed because his treatment of animals seemed to go along with what was expected of children. The introduction of "The Black Cat" appears to suggest the conception of family intimacy begins during the narrator's childhood where he, like many children during the 19<sup>th</sup> century "learn[s] to be human by being taught how to be humane" (Boggs 116) to animals. So, at first glance, one might believe the narrator's original affective relationship with animals sets him up to have a healthy affective relationship with humans later on in life. However, as mentioned above, this relational transference fails because of its self-indulgence and false sense of altruism. He loves the animals because they are objects; they are possessions present only for his own pleasure. Because of the root of his tenderness for animals, "he maintains a literal love of animals and fails to undergo the expected process of symbolic transference" (Boggs 117). He cannot transfer his love from object to subject because he cannot own the subject. Consequently, if "the subject is not self-sufficient but relies on affective relationships" (Boggs 6), then one can see how the narrator's failure to mature in his symbolic transference inhibits him from maturing from a childish subjectivity to an adult understanding and expression of his subjectivity.

The narrator manages to avoid the consequences of this deficit "for several years" until his "general temperament and character-through the instrumentality of the Fiend intemperance- had experienced a radical alteration for the worse" (Poe 382). The narrator blames this change on intemperance and perverseness. However, his alcoholism seems to be a result, not a cause. The true cause is his subconscious realization that he has failed to properly mature. He cannot help but notice that "both [his] childlessness and joblessness

indicate [his] inability to meet biologically and culturally determined gender expectations” (Bliss 97). Having already embodied many feminine traits, his inability to manifest his masculinity in two of the more compulsory modes of male duties forces him to adopt other methods of asserting his masculinity.

His initial attempts surface in the forms of alcoholism and aggression. The aggression initially manifests through verbal abuse, irritability, and neglect of others. Eventually, this aggression transforms into physical violence to his wife and then his pets. However, the only in-depth description of his physical abuse “is hardly an act of manly bravado; it is more the behavior of a prepubescent boy” (Bliss 97). Even in his deliberate attempts to perform masculinity, he fails. This sends him further into distress and frustration. Consequently, his alcoholism worsens. His alcoholism eliminates the few fragments of empathy he has left. Empathy was the only string tying him to his animals, aside from his own selfishness. With this gone, his selfish, immoral self takes the helm. He calls this self “the spirit of perverseness” (Poe 383), separating his own faults from his actual self. This perverse self detests the cat for its fear of the narrator, though the narrator acknowledges it is his own fault. The alienation of the only affective relationship the narrator had left foreshadows the imminent collapse of his subjectivity.

Considering that the narrator is writing the story after everything has happened, one can assume he has already gone mad and is now writing the narrative under the influence of a flawed subjectivity. This can be tracked throughout the story, but it is most evident once his psychological breakdown has begun. While he intricately describes the torture and murder of the first cat, he “glosses over the spousal abuse” (Bliss 97) as well as the abuse to his pets. Even his murder of his wife merits only two sentences. Grouping

his wife with the other pets further demonstrates how the narrator has failed to recognize his wife as a subjective being and consequently grouped her with the object pets.

Thus far in the narrative, no character other than the narrator has shown any sort of agency. This falls in line with the narrator's perception of all beings in his life being objects, leaving him as the only subject. However, once the narrator gouges out the eye of the cat, the cat begins to show a change in the pattern that the narrator cannot avoid describing. As mentioned early, the cat "fled in extreme terror at [his] approach" (Poe 383). The narrator does not see this as fear so much as "evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved [him]" (Poe 383). The cat has chosen its own self as a subject over the narrator. It has rejected its position as object by expressing free will against the narrator. Angered by this, the narrator:

hung it-*because* I knew that it loved me, and *because* I felt  
it had given me no reason of offense;- hung it *because* I  
knew that in so doing I was committing a sin- a deadly sin  
that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it- if  
such a thing were possible- even beyond the reach of the  
infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God  
(Poe 383).

The action, while horrible, does not warrant this amount of condemnation. As Gargano mentions, the narrator's view of how damnable the hanging of the cat is "would be embarrassing even to the most shameless animal lover" (173). This "outrageous excess" (Gargano 173) of condemnation suggests the narrator knows he is doing more than just killing an animal when he hangs his cat. In a literal sense, he is unjustly murdering a

living being. Not only has this creature done nothing to warrant the murder, the creature has done the exact opposite. He also was fully conscious of his actions. Committing the act in the morning in “cool blood” (Poe 383), the reader understands the narrator was sober and not moved by “the fiend of intemperance” (Poe 382). This is the first violent act the narrator commits without being under the influence of alcohol. The narrator’s soberness shows that he not only has lost all ability to empathize but also that he is as aware as he can be of the relationship between the cat and himself. This detail adds a symbolic importance to the literal significance of the murder. The narrator has acknowledged the cat’s expression of free will. In this acknowledgement, the narrator must also recognize the cat’s exit, albeit partial, from the object category and assertion of itself as a subject. Outraged by the existence of a subject other than himself, the narrator acts to reposition himself as the sole subject. For this reason, the narrator condemns himself to such an extreme level.

With his last affective relationship completely destroyed, the man’s flawed subjectivity has no hope of being repaired. Without feeling for others, the man can only feel for himself. Left with only his own thoughts, he slips further into insanity. The second cat draws out this insanity. He cannot help but stew on his treachery, especially with the cat constantly reminding him of it through “the patch of white that, for the narrator, increasingly comes to resemble a gallows” (Bliss 97). It is important to note here that the narrator convicts himself through his perception of the cat’s fur. However, he displaces his conviction through expressing his anxiety in the form of anger towards the cat, rather than guilt centered on himself and his actions.

Instead of showing the failed transferall of affection and morality, like the first cat, the second cat shows the consequences of that failure. The narrator is able to justify his hatred to the cat through its lack of devotion to him and the wife's love for it. The hatred then, the narrator says, causes him to feel "terror and horror" (Poe 384) from the cat's "loathsome caresses" (384). While the narrator says these negative feelings are a result of his hatred, the hatred is actually a result, not a cause. The true cause is the reversing of the subject-object binary within the narrator's world. Notice that, in the beginning, the narrator is the one caressing his animals. Never do they caress him or do anything to him that he does to them. They are clear object pets and he is the clear subject human. Because he never was able to transfer the skills he was supposed to learn through being humane to animals to humans, he never understands life outside of subject-object relations. With the cat caressing him, he becomes the object and the cat the subject.

Consequently, it takes the man's rage less time to work itself up to commit the act of murder. As he descends into the cellar, the cat trips him, causing him to "forget, in [his] wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand" (Poe 386). Here, he calls his dread "childish" but in actuality, he is unable to act against the cat because of his subscioius conception of himself as object. Immediately, he remembers his desired position and attempts to regain it. Instead of killing his cat, his wife stays his hand which causes him to "bur[y] the axe in [her] brain" (Poe 386). He does this because his wife did essentially what the first cat did: asserted her own free will in an act contrary to the wishes of the narrator. Once again, an object of his has reversed the roles. Consequently, he is "goaded, by [her] interference" (Poe 386) into killing her. Once again, however, the

reader receives much less detail of the murder than given on the killing and torturing of the first cat.

Instead, the reader is given an in-depth description of the narrator's thought process on how to hide the body: his thoughts on how to forget both his atrocities and his reason for committing them. He decides "to wall it up in the cellar" (Poe 386). Choosing to hide his crime within his own home suggests a symbolic relationship between the narrator desired perception of reality and the perception he wishes to ignore. He cannot forget either, but he can bury one so deep into his subconscious, he can wall it up, so that he cannot see it. The wife, who represented the reality the narrator wished to ignore, now has been returned to her state as object in the mind of the narrator and killed, so she stays there, hidden, so he is not reminded of what once was.

The cat, however, has not had any of these things done to it, which is why the narrator seeks to destroy it. Believing it to have fled, the narrator is able to "look upon [his] future felicity as secured" (Poe 387), with "the guilt of [his] dark deed disturbing [him] but little" (Poe 387). However, as the reader soon discovers, the cat is alive and has been walled up with the wife. So, instead of pushing his true perceptions into the subconscious, dead and unable to escape, the facts he continuously denies are alive and able to act, though they may be hidden.

In its final assertion of its subjectivity, the cat speaks for the first and only time. This is also the only time the narrator gives a voice to any character in the story. He gives the cat voice because he must. He must give a voice to the "wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the

throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation” (Poe 387). The cat, having exposed the narrator as a murderer, has denied its position as object of the narrator. The narrator, then, is left destined for the noose, only able to put his wife and pets in their position as his objects through writing.

I am interested in these last lines from the narrator for multiple reasons. Chief of these is in discerning whom the narrator says this “wailing shriek” comes from. He seems to say that it is not just the cat, but that it comes “conjointly from the throats of the damned” (387). Who are the damned here? While the narrator could mean many different things by this, I find a connection between the voice of the cat and the collective voice of those who have been objectified in the way the cat has. Not only this, but also, I find specifically that these conjoined voices coming from the throats of those who cannot speak in the language of the law. For this reason, the voice shrieks with both horror and triumph. The cat is able to alert the police to the man’s crimes. But, which crimes actually convict the man? He is not arrested for animal cruelty and murder; he is arrested and tried for only the murder of his wife. So, while the cats receive partial justice, they do not receive it because they have claimed any damages done to themselves. There is no recognition of the oppression the animals have suffered. Even the animals themselves cannot fully bear witness to the humans what they have suffered at the hands of their owner. Since the police do not know what the man has done to the animals, they could not possibly convict the man of anything other than the murder of his wife. So, the man’s crimes towards animals technically go unpunished.

## **V. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and Crimes Committed by the Non-Human Animal**



In an inversion of the position of the animal, the Orangutan goes unpunished for its murder of the women in “The Murders in Rue Morgue.” In this story, we see both how the “‘anatomopolitics’ of the modern state does not limit its reach to human bodies but also exercises power over animal bodies” (Boggs 11), and how the foundation of biopower’s ability to reach in this way also limits its ability to hold animals as accountable subjects within human culture. In short, the modern state exerts its power in a self-destructive way that leaves many loose ends. This is seen first through the confusion as to who committed the murder, the following question of what crime was committed, and the consequent aftermath of a double homicide committed by an Orangutan. Boggs, in her book, argues that “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” shows Poe’s investigation into an argument that places humans “not as the opposite of the animal, but as the result of the relationship to another designated as ‘animal’” (126). From this argument, the making of human subjectivity is “contingent on the relation to ‘the animal,’ where both share the same shifting terrain” (126). My argument differs from hers in that, instead of using the story to show how human subjectivity is produced in reference to the animal, I use the story to show how humans’ view of subjectivity and objectivity as they relate to animals is laid out as a concrete thing, but, given the proper situation, is treated in a much more fluid way than human structures describe.

From the very beginning of the story, the reader’s mind is primed towards questioning not only the differences in types of intelligence, but also the validity placed upon these types by culture. This comes in the form of the narrator’s seemingly unrelated treatise on the difference between acumen and ingenuity: “The analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily ingenious,

the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis” (Poe 242). It is important here to notice that a hierarchy has been constructed within the claims of the narrator. The analyst must be ingenious, but the ingenious is not always capable of analysis. Consequently, one who possesses both powers of reasoning is greater than the merely ingenious human.

This might seem unrelated to my own thesis until the narrator carries on thus:

The constructive or combining power, by which ingenuity is usually manifested, and to which the phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a separate organ, supposing it a primitive faculty, has been so frequently seen in those whose intellect bordered otherwise on idiocy, as to have attracted general observation among writers on morals” (Poe 242).

The inclusion of science, specifically phrenology, and moral writers brings the narrator’s discourse into dialogue with not only the discourse on human and animal evolution, but also with the theory of biopolitics. In calling into question, if not outright discrediting the current cultural understanding of what differentiates humans from one another, the narrator sets up a foundation for questioning animals’ place in reference to the human from the very beginning of the story. Boggs takes this one step further in finding the narrator drawing a parallel between Dupin and the orangutan. She points out how the narrator parallels the strong man’s enjoyment of physical exercise with the analyst’s enjoyment of analysis. Not only is this connection expressed implicitly here, but it is

explicitly demonstrated throughout the text in the way that Dupin is consistently lauded for his analytical capabilities in the same way that the orangutan is marked by his strength. So, while this first portion of the text seems almost entirely unrelated to the actual crime narrative, it actually begins the process of questioning the human/animal binary in two ways before even bringing an animal into the story. So, the reader begins the actual narrative “somewhat in the light of a commentary upon all the propositions just advanced” (242), the commentary being an introduction of a discourse of the human/animal binary and how it pertains to the law.

This discourse reveals itself more fully in the newspaper article. The paper gives almost every detail available at the crime scene, yet cannot find even a small clue. The newspaper has no choice but to acknowledge “a murder so mysterious, and so perplexing, in all its particulars, was never before committed in Paris-if indeed a murder has been committed at all. The police are entirely at fault-an unusual occurrence in affairs of this nature. There is not, however, the shadow of a clew apparent” (Poe 251). Within this statement, the reader finds much of the tensions that my argument deals with. The witnesses to the event find it so perplexing because of the lack of evidence. However, once the evidence is sorted out and the true nature of the event is explained, we find that no one but Dupin seems to make any more sense of it than they did before. By the end of the story, the witnesses understand how the women died. Yet, they still do not understand whether or not “a murder has been committed at all.” It seems the question is even more pertinent at the end of the story than at the beginning. For this reason, Boggs astutely questions why the paper even is skeptic of the occurrence of murder. I find it important here to establish that within murder are the implications of “the capacity for thought” and

“the capacity for a temporally forward-looking (afore) thought that carries a moral component (malice)” (Boggs 112). The manner in which the corpses are found suggests that all of these specifications apply to this situation. In addition to these specifications, using the word murder to describe the death of one at the hands of another “implies that a legal subject carries it out” (Boggs 112). Nobody sees the murderer, but many claim to hear him, implying the presence of a subject. In short, the presence of corpses and the nature in which they are found implies that a crime has occurred. The only thing missing is an embodied murderer.

The accounts given by the witnesses and by the newspaper, however, only relay accounts of a disembodied murderer. Only the accounts of a voice heard other than that of the two women proves the presence of another being. These “earwitness” (Boggs 127) accounts seem to expose exactly what Boggs points out as the issues residing in posthumanism and its correlation to animal representations. Specifically, the way voice and communication work in this situation demonstrate the ways in which embodiment and representation both combine and diverge within a biopolitical context to both make and unmake human structures, the human subject and human law being the two chief structures in question here.

Each of the witnesses describes two voices, assumedly human. Not only do they explicitly say they are human, each witness ascribes a nationality and a personality to both voices. However, the reader, by the end of the story, knows one to be a human animal voice and another to be a non-human animal voice. Boggs describes this mistake as a failure “to recognize, to witness tonally, because each attempts to witness linguistically” (127). The witnesses have skipped a crucial step in delivering their

account in that they skip straight from communication to forms of human language. However, the reader understands the speaker to be a non-human animal, and therefore the form of communication is tonal, not linguistic. This makes evident the difference between the voices themselves and the embodiment of those voices. The implications of the voices change when they are embodied. Herein lies the illustration within the story of the convergence of the two different posthumanist approaches that focus on either embodiment or semiotics, “or, more broadly speaking, information technologies” (Boggs 10). The information technology here is communication. The voices emit verbal signs that the listeners, the “earwitnesses,” are not able to find the proper signifier they relate to. The nature of the communication, and even the idea of the sounds being communication, or, more specifically, language at all, change once the voices are embodied. Without the body to go along with the voice, the witnesses assume that not merely a crime, but a murder has been committed. The evident communication that everyone hears implies that there was a subject to speak these words. Therefore, a subject was present to commit the murders. However, when it is revealed that the voice is embodied through an orangutan, the earwitnesses must backtrack slightly. The murderer turns from a legal subject to a moral subject. The morality of this instance will be discussed later when the sailor’s account is discussed. For the time being, I will limit the discussion to how the embodiment of the voice seems to prompt the witnesses to deny that there is a true murderer.

In contrast to the witnesses and police, Dupin never seems to question whether a murder has been committed or not. The women were killed by an act of violence, and thus a murder occurred. He never strays from calling the killings murder. Neither does he

change the name of the killer from murderer to something else once he proves that it was an animal that did the killing. He does not sway from his convictions because, unlike the police, he does not “hold the object too close” (252). The wording here is important in understanding that, while this sentence’s immediate context refers to something else, the text itself points out that the police are holding the animal object too close and disregarding the animal subject. Their notions of animal inhibit them from entertaining the idea that what they perceive as an obvious murder could have been done by anything other than a human. Dupin astutely points this out in showing how “it appears [to him] that this mystery is considered insoluble, for the very reason which should cause it to be regarded as easy of solution” (Poe 253). It is not that there is a lack of clues, but there is a fault in the language of the law employed in investigating the clues that allows ease of interpreting them. This fault is the way in which animals are represented and classified within the law.

By mistaking the structured concepts of society for objective, pre-existent truths, all members in the story but Dupin have limited their ability to interpret the clues. Instead of this method, Dupin works on the assumption that “all apparent impossibilities *must* be proved to be not such in reality. [So, he] proceeded to think thus-*à posteriori*. The murderers *did* escape from one of these windows” (Poe 256). Working thus, he deconstructs both the clues and the assumptions made by the police to show that not only are these “apparent impossibilities” possible, but also the ways in which the methods of agents of the state fail.

The latter portion of this quote brings me to the next, and perhaps most problematic, portion of the issues this story raises. Only a few moments before using the

word murderer in the plural, Dupin states that he believes the sailor who owns the orangutan is “perhaps not the perpetrator of these butcheries, [but] must have been in some measure implicated in their perpetration” and, consequently, “it is probable that he is innocent” (Poe 253-254). How then, do we justify Dupin’s suspecting the man is innocent while also labeling him as one of the “murderers”? In addition to this, how do we explain Dupin’s persistent labeling of the orangutan as a murder when he allows both the orangutan and the sailor responsible for it to go free with no qualms? I find Dupin’s explanation for these inconsistencies in the following passage:

You will say, no doubt, using the language of the law, that  
 ‘to make out my case,’ I should rather undervalue, than  
 insist upon a full estimation of the activity required in this  
 matter. This may be the practice of the law, but it is not the  
 usage of reason. My ultimate object is only the truth. My  
 immediate purpose is to lead you to place in juxtaposition,  
 that *very unusual* activity of which I have just spoken with  
 that *very peculiar* shrill (or harsh) and *unequal* voice. (Poe  
 258)

Dupin, here speaks specifically towards his explanation of the two voices, but in a more broad sense, he speaks about his understanding of the case as a whole. He points out that the practices of the law do not always make full use of reason. In saying his ultimate object is the truth, he implies that that is not always the goal of the law. In his rhetorical process, he attempts to have the narrator justify the voice, the representation, with the peculiar way in which the murderer entered the building, or, the evidence of the

murderer's peculiar embodiment. All of this amounts to Dupin subtly stating that the language of the law cannot possibly account for an explanation of the nature of the crime committed. It cannot because the law has confined itself to relating primarily to human subjects. In its dealings with animals, it operates under the assumption that animals are objects. Consequently, when animals exhibit agency and assert themselves as subjects, such as the way the orangutan does, the law is paralyzed by its own language, limitations, and assumptions. The law cannot convict an animal in human language because that is not the mode of the animal's communication. It also cannot do this because animal subjects do not exist in the language of the law: the orangutan cannot be a legal subject.

While the orangutan may not be capable of murder on a legal level, the text seems to suggest it is capable of murder as defined by morality, making the orangutan a moral, not a legal, subject. The narrator describes the orangutan's actions as clearly reactions of malice and wrath. It kills both women in a "phrenzy," "inflamed by the sight of blood," he claws, gnashes, and strikes with "wrath" and "determination" (Poe 265). The language used is explicit in showing the murders were thought through, intentional, and done with malice or ill intent. Upon seeing the sailor, seeing the only eyewitness, the orangutan becomes "conscious of having deserved punishment, [and] seemed desirous of concealing its bloody deeds" (Poe 265). The orangutan knows he has done something wrong. While the orangutan shows no signs of guilt, it definitely shows that it understands it has done something wrong. In addition to this, it further proves this point by trying to cover up exactly what it has done wrong. In this reading, one can see how the orangutan can be counted as a moral subject.



Returning to the union of the symbolic and the physical, I would like to look at the orangutan's use of the razor blade in demonstrating how the above statements prove themselves in both physical embodiment and in symbolic representation. On a physical level, the orangutan is able to behead the old lady via the sailor's shaving razor. Consequently, the sailor, by unintentionally giving the orangutan access to the razor, gives the orangutan the power to behead the woman. Yet, we also see the Orangutan does not need the razor to kill, because he has no issue in murdering the younger woman with his bare hands. Therefore, on a physical level, the orangutan's power comes from himself and is strengthened through the unintentional carelessness of the human. This correlates to the way in which the human population empowers the orangutan to murder without accountability to the law. By placing animals in such close proximity to humans, humans implicitly place animals in close proximity to the law. The difference, however, is that the law applies to subjects only, and can only apply to objects in the way that those objects relate to humans. If the animal is object, then it cannot commit crimes on its own. Consequently, in the case of murder, humans can be murdered by animals, but animals cannot murder humans. The difference lies in that humans must be the subjects of the sentence in order for the language of the law to be employed.

So, the orangutan, as a subject not acknowledged by the human law, can in truth murder, but not in the eyes of the law. For this reason, the orangutan goes free without accountability to the law. Yet, the question still remains as to why the sailor, if he is responsible for the object animal, is not accountable instead. It has already been noted that Dupin suspects the sailor to be innocent of but implicated in the crime, but his words to the sailor seem to reveal even more:

I perfectly well know that you are innocent of the atrocities in the Rue Morgue. It will not do, however, to deny that you are in some measure implicated in them . . . . You have done nothing which you could have avoided- nothing, certainly, which renders you culpable. You were not even guilty of robbery, when you might have robbed with impunity. You have nothing to conceal. You have no reason for concealment. On the other hand, you are bound by every principle of honor to confess all you know. An innocent man is imprisoned, charged with that crime of which you can point out the perpetrator. (Poe 263-264)

Dupin, once again, acknowledges the man's innocence of the crime. Even the reader can agree that the sailor himself did not murder the women. Yet, the sailor was involved in the crime. His orangutan murdered the women and his razor was used to murder. Dupin keenly acknowledges that there was nothing the sailor could have done to avoid this situation. Therefore, the law cannot convict him of a crime. The law cannot count him as responsible for the actions of another, especially if, as the text shows, he attempted to stop them. The emphasis here is on doing. He has *done* nothing deserving of conviction. But, his object-possession has. If one is responsible for one's objects, then it is implied that the owner is responsible for whatever comes from this object. Consequently, the sailor is responsible for the murder. Yet, Dupin understands that the law cannot hold the sailor responsible for this object because it has acted outside of its role: it has acted as a subject. The sailor can only be responsible for the animal if the animal is an object. Once

the animal asserts himself as subject, he can no longer be fully considered a possession of the sailor. Consequently, the sailor not only, but cannot be held responsible for the orangutan and therefore not responsible for the murders.

Simply put, the law in this situation has ignored the animal's subjectivity as it relates to the murdered but acknowledged it in regards to the human accountable for the murderer. In this way, we see the dangers of how "biopower hinges on the production of species difference as a strategically ambivalent rather than absolute line, allowing for contradictory power to both dissolve and reinscribe borders between humans and animals" (Boggs 11).

## **VI. Non-Human Animals Above and Below the Law**

Thus, biopower, as it is exerted in these stories, offers an effective tool for oppression not only of animals, but also of the humans that both victimize and are victimized by such forms of power. In looking at the two stories side by side, three common themes surface. The influence of voice, the muddling of subjectivity, and the failure of the justice system seem to be the most evident issues that bring the two texts together.

Both stories depict non-human animals using their voices in a fashion that problematizes the way in which the other characters and the reader view and deal with the animal's presence. In "The Black Cat," the voice of the cat seems to cry out for justice while at the same time pass judgment on the narrator. Yet, the justice that the cat seems to demand is not given. As mentioned earlier, the man is imprisoned and condemned to the gallows, but not for his crimes against animals. On one level, the cat uses its subjectivity via its voice to take action within the legal system against the

narrator. However, on another level, the reader sees the cat hopelessly stating its existence with no answer back. The police do not hail the cat in return to its vocalization. It is treated by both the police and, ultimately, the narrator, as a coincidence that allows the wife's murderer to be punished. Yet, another murder, the murder of the first cat, goes unpunished. In the same way, another murder goes unpunished in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as a result of humans ignoring non-human animal voices. Here, however, the animal is the murderer. The orangutan escapes punishment for the very reason that the cat is denied justice: the law cannot acknowledge animals as subjects. Lacking legal subject status, the orangutan cannot legally murder. Through this comparison, one sees how both animals are not so much outside of the law as much as respectively above and below.

The problems in interpreting the voices of animals in these stories both bleed into and are formed off of the characters' understanding of subjectivity and who is subject and object, and where the privilege lies on either side of the binary. In "The Black Cat," it is clear that the narrator is both the primary subject and the holder of privilege. This comes from, and is in part only made possible by, his construction of his private world. Both his spousal and animal abuse is rooted in his relationship to the animals. By misunderstanding subjectivity and depriving his self of affective relationships, he forces both his wife and pets into object positions. The collective view of subjectivity, displayed by the police, locks the cats into oppressed object positions, while they grant the wife, though she is deceased, subjectivity. Consequently, the cats are below the law in that they receive neither justice nor privilege. In contrast, the orangutan's failure to be hailed as a subject grants him privilege in that he avoids judicial punishment. As seen earlier,

however, the orangutan's position diverges from the cat's in that it is granted, or able to take for itself, subjectivity in part. The orangutan having partial subjectivity seems to be the only explanation for why the sailor is not convicted of the murders.

The lack of conviction points out the final, and possibly most important, of these three parallels between the two narratives. Placing human animals and non-human animals in such close proximity implies that non-human animals will come in contact with human law. Both of these stories show how the constructed law as it stands is inadequate when dealing with occurrences between humans and animals. By law, animals are object possessions. By nature, animals are subjects. Human intervention has placed many animals into an odd position of subject-possession in which animals have a limited agency. This limited agency results in animals being morally accountable by the language of the law, but not legally accountable. In these stories, crimes cannot be done to animals in the same way they can be done to humans. Conversely, animals cannot commit crimes against humans in the way that humans can. By placing such ambiguous definitions where subjectivity is conveyed as an either/or concept, but treated in a more fluid manner that accommodates the situation, the language of the law provides for situations where heinous crimes are enabled and unpunished. This ambiguity allows the narrator of "The Black Cat" to justify the murder of his wife and denies justice to the two women brutally murdered in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Both of these stories show human characters attempting to force animals into a mold that best fits humanity's goals. Inevitably these attempts overlap with crime and other human defined structures related to the law. Instead of looking at animals as they exist, the characters either choose to or are forced by their own biases to look at animals

through the structures of knowing plotted out for them. Consequently, the perceptions of both animals and humans are locked into a mode of thought constructed through binaries. Through these stories, we see how both animals and humans do not function in a way that completely adheres to these binaries. The law is also built off of these binaries and is therefore flawed in its application to both humans and animals. However, in the presentation of the human-animal binary, the fluidity of both humans' and animals' relationships with subjectivity is muddled and ignored. Through this muddling, forms of power are able to exert themselves in ways that oppress individuals that do not lie on the privileged side of these binaries. The analyses employed here need not be limited to just these two stories or the work of Poe specifically. In reading animals in a way that rethinks our notions of subjectivity, we find ourselves closer to understanding where human structures are flawed and consequently where things need to be rethought and fixed. In this particular context, a rethinking of subjectivity might lead to a more effective legal system: a system that manages to navigate relationships between humans and non-humans in a more egalitarian way.

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